

An Abbreviated History Related to Kindergarten in Wisconsin

Prepared for the 2014 Preserving Early Childhood Conference

Note: The legislation, committees, and reports highlighted in this history focus on those most directly related to four-year-old kindergarten, the school role in early education, and collaboration between schools and the community. This summary does not include all relevant legislation or reports more closely associated with child care or family support/education.

1800: Immigrants came to Wisconsin needing a new system of schooling.

1841: State Constitution created common public school and equalized aid starting with 4 year olds.

1856: First private kindergartens begin in Watertown. Kindergarten followed the German “kindergarten approach” but all were private. (Programs open to 2, 3, 4, 5 year olds).

1873: First kindergarten opens in Manitowoc, Wisconsin (serves 4& 5 year olds).

1898: Wisconsin legislature permits schools to establish four-year-old kindergarten (4K) and five-year-old kindergarten (5K).

1919: Legislatures allows local taxes to be levied for kindergarten.

1927: State financial aid established for 4&5K.

1949: 4&5K counted as 1/2 pupil for state aids.

1957: Legislature repealed 4K aids.

1973: Legislature required districts to provide 5K.

1980: DPI Task Force studied 4K.

1984: Legislature reinstated 4K aids & allows 5K aids for full day.

1984: Legislation passed to allow school districts to establish, contract or provide prekindergarten or kindergarten.

1989: Decker Task Force recommended statewide plan for comprehensive early education, child care and family services; establishing local early childhood councils based on school district boundaries; increased roles for schools to involve parents; changes to existing legislation to promote collaboration; collaboration between schools, child care, Head Start and families; and increasing access to higher education programs.

1990: 21st Century School Commission - School Readiness Committee made recommendations related to school foundation for early childhood (mandating full day 5K and 1/2 day 4K, mandatory kindergarten attendance, Head Start expansion); education market plan; interagency coordination (commission on children and families and state department cooperation); establishing community foundation for early childhood systems (councils, schools role in assisting with community based services); foundations for student success (ungraded primary units, reduce adult/child ratios, incentive

grant, communication, promote understanding of diversity); interrelation of social and educational policies (food programs, child/family policies, education health partnership); parent education (access, resource centers, school-parent communication, family leave, parent conferences); and requiring community service credit for high school students.

1991: Legislature allowed 4K 20% time outreach to parents.

1994: First of three early childhood summits brought state departments and related associations to the table. These meetings lead to the development of early childhood care and education guiding principals and the creation of the Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners (WECCP).

1995: Joint Legislative Council established Special Committee on Child Care Economics that proposed legislation including establishing local early childhood council grant program; authorization for school boards to lease space, contract for, or provide prekindergarten or kindergarten; and state transportation aid to transport children from school to child care

2000: La Crosse pioneers the collaborative community approach for 4K, Community Approaches (4KCA) are born.

2001: Legislature addresses proposal to increase 4K aid to full day. The final vote reduced funding for districts operating 4K programs. Republican Governor McCallum vetoed these provisions.

2001: Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners (WECCP) report identifies opportunities for government action including development of common vision, mechanisms for communication, promoting quality standards, developing data systems, and addressing professional development.

2002: National Governors Association Grant to Build Public and Political Will for Early Childhood Care and Education addresses and makes recommendations related to collaboration, improving access and quality, developing a state level infrastructure, promoting a seamless system of services for children birth to age eight, improving professional development, generating public awareness, supporting community service delivery, and ensuring sufficient funding.

2003: Trust for Early Education funds planning grants to promote 4K and community approaches.

2003: Legislature again voted to cut funding for districts operating 4K programs. Democratic Governor Doyle vetoed these provisions.

2004: Trust for Early Education funds implementation grants to promote 4K and community approaches.

2006: Inclusion in 4K becomes a community approach concept.

2008: 4K start up grants are included in the state budget with a priority on districts implementing using community approaches. (See http://ec.dpi.wi.gov/ec_ec4yr-old-kind-grants)

2008: The Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) was founded as a result of the Head Start reauthorization Act of 2007 and Executive Order #269 (April 2009). The ECAC built upon the work of the WECCP, the Children's Trust Fund Board, the Individuals with Disabilities Act Part C Birth to Three Interagency Coordinating Council, as well as several cross sector committees including

professional development and comprehensive screening and assessment. The ECAC adopted three focus areas: quality early learning, safe and healthy children, and stable and nurturing families.

2010: The Department of Children and Families (DCF) developed YoungStar to assist Child Care providers in the assessment and improvement of the level of quality in services they offer.

2012: Based on recommendations from Governor Scott Walker's Read to Lead Task Force, the Wisconsin legislature required adoption of an early literacy screener. The Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) is a research-based screening tool used to identify students who are at-risk for having difficulty learning to read. Data from the screening is used to match literacy instruction to students' specific literacy needs. PALS was administered to all 5-year old kindergarten students for the 2012-13 school year and to all 4-year-old kindergarten to 1st grade students for the 2013-14 school year. The requirement was expanded in the 2014-15 school year to all 2nd grade students.

2014: Many communities using 4KCA submit their stories and they are posted on the DPI website at: <http://4kca.dpi.wi.gov/>